

VZCZCXRO1314
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #3407/01 2560609
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 130609Z SEP 06
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6852
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHINGTON DC//NSC//

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003407

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/13/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KWMN](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: IRAQI WOMEN'S AFFAIRS MINISTER OFF TO A SLOW
START, BUT HAS POTENTIAL

REF: BAGHDAD 02445

Classified By: Political Counselor Margaret Scobey, reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY. After three months on the job, little has changed within the Ministry of State for Women's Affairs (MOWA) under Minister Fatin Abd al-Rahman. Abd al-Rahman's personal concerns have largely dominated her time in the ministry. MOWA Economic Advisor Salam Smeisim said that Abd al-Rahman's inexperience in government made it difficult for her to understand the roles of the various ministry departments. MOWA Legal Advisor Hussain Al-Safy cited Abd al-Rahman's lack of communication skills as a source of increased tension within the ministry. GRD/PCO Project Manager Azza Humadi, however, was enthusiastic about Abd al-Rahman's potential, citing her youthfulness as a potential advantage once she has more on-the-job experience. All appealed for support, noting that the minister is not yet politically or media savvy. Al-Safy also detailed ongoing MOWA legal projects, including draft legislation to elevate the status of the ministry and Constitutional Review priorities. End Summary.

Personal Concerns, Differences Hamper Ministry

12. (C) Personal concerns about housing and access in the international zone have dominated MOWA Minister Abd al-Rahman for several months after taking office. In an August 24 conversation, MOWA Economic Advisor Salam Smeisim told Poloff that she and Abd al-Rahman held differing views on women's issues and the role of the ministry. Smeisim, an Economics PhD holder who has worked at MOWA for two years, sees the ministry as an advocate of women's rights. She believes the primary function of the ministry should be outreach and awareness rather than programming. Smeisim noted that, as a Ministry of State, there was little budget for programs. Solicitation of funds from outside organizations opened the ministry to allegations of corruption and misuse, so Smeisim advocated providing support and assistance, with no money changing hands.

13. (C) Smeisim claimed that Abd al-Rahman disagreed with this vision, preferring to focus her efforts on pushing for elevation of her ministry to full ministerial status (with benefits and budget). She said that although she had briefly discussed ideas to promote economic development and literacy with the minister, Abd al-Rahman seemed to believe that Smeisim's job, as Economic Advisor, was to "do the ministry's books." Smeisim appealed to the Embassy to help educate the minister on the basic tenets of women's issues (economic development, education, legal rights, etc.), and specifically on strategies to boost economic opportunity for women in Iraq.

Legal Advisor Appeals for Help

14. (C) At his request, Poloff met with MOWA Legal Advisor Hussain Al-Safy on August 17. Al-Safy was clearly nervous that he had not received permission to meet with us from the minister, but said that his concerns about the ministry had prompted him to call. He noted that there were serious administrative and financial problems within the ministry, and expressed gratitude for the upcoming DOS training program as a potential vehicle to address some of the problems.

15. (C) Al-Safy said that there are currently no plans for projects that he thought would have impact, and lamented that the minister had agreed to "three projects in Jordan, but they are completely useless." He said that he had proposed approaching international organizations for funding, and was pleased that the minister had agreed. Al-Safy met with the IO section at MFA, and together the ministries are planning to approach UNICEF with some proposals.

16. (C) According to Al-Safy, there is considerable tension both between the minister and her staff and between the minister and the average Iraqi woman. He attributed the strain to a lack of communication and to the minister's "non-savvy style." Al-Safy noted that the minister is intelligent and legitimately concerned about women's issues. However, she does not communicate well with her staff and her style is exactly opposite of her predecessor, who was generally well liked within the ministry.

BAGHDAD 00003407 002 OF 002

17. (C) Al-Safy added that the minister has had little communication with the public and has not managed to build the trust of the average Iraqi woman, who sees the minister as young, inexperienced, and most importantly, conservative. He stressed the importance of media training and asked for Poloff's assistance to help raise the minister's profile.

Legal Office Busy With Draft Legislation

18. (C) Despite his complaints about the minister, Al-Safy noted that the busiest office in the ministry is his own legal office. He has prepared new draft legislation to elevate the ministry from a ministry of state to a full fledged ministry, which he has already sent to MOJ's Shura Council for approval. Al-Safy said that there was still some debate about the scope of the bill, as MOWA had proposed creating a Ministry of Women and Family Affairs, while the Shura Council preferred the ministry be limited to women's affairs. Al-Safy has also put together a list of priorities for the Constitutional Review period, including reversing limits on women's rights to travel and work. (COMMENT: Per reftel, post is still unclear as to the legal basis for requiring a male signature on a female passport application. While we have interpreted Articles 14 and 44, which include provisions against gender discrimination, to negate any such law that may remain on the books, MOWA appears to accept the practice at face value. This position may lend legitimacy to those who claim a legal basis for the requirement, and passing legislation to change it would be difficult. END COMMENT.)

19. (C) When asked about cooperation between the ministry and the Committee on Women, Families and Children's Affairs in the COR, Al-Safy confirmed that the chairwoman, Samirah Al-Mousawi (Shia Independent), had visited the minister and talked about areas for cooperation. He said that the committee's priorities and issues were similar to those of

the ministry, and that the two groups agreed to meet frequently to coordinate activities.

Project Manager Cites Minister's Potential

¶10. (C) Gulf Region Division and Project and Contracting Office (GRD-PCO) Women's Advocate Initiative Program Manager Azza Humadi told Poloff on September 5 that she had high hopes for Abd al-Rahman over the next year. Humadi acknowledged that the minister had gotten off to a slow start, but said that she was very bright and would learn quickly if surrounded by the right people. Humadi noted that the minister's youthf(she was born in 1973) could actually work in her favor, enabling her to speak directly to the younger generation that would be most active in reconstruction efforts. She pledged to continue to support Abd al-Rahman, and reported that she was currently organizing a seminar on businesswoman basics to be conducted at the ministry.
KHALILZAD